

# What Works Clearinghouse



## Success for All<sup>®</sup>

### Program description<sup>1</sup>

*Success for All (SFA)*<sup>®</sup> is a comprehensive school reform model that includes a reading, writing, and oral language development program for students in pre-kindergarten through grade eight. Its underlying premise is that all children can and should be reading at grade level by the end of third grade and then remain at grade level thereafter. Classroom reading instruction is delivered in daily 90-minute blocks to students grouped by reading ability. Immediate intervention with tutors who are certified teachers is given each day to those students who are having difficulty reading at the same level as their classmates. A full-time *SFA*<sup>®</sup> facilitator employed by the school supports classroom instruction by training teachers, overseeing student assessments, and assisting with decisions about group placement and tutoring. Family Support Teams work on parent involvement, absenteeism, and student behavior.

This intervention report focuses on the reading instructional component of *SFA*<sup>®</sup>, which is often implemented in the context of the highly structured *SFA*<sup>®</sup> whole school reform program. Although the whole school reform program has key components that are implemented in each school, school sites may vary considerably in the number of personnel used to implement *SFA*<sup>®</sup>, particularly tutors and family support staff. The reading curricula are essentially the same at all schools, with each school receiving the same training, coaching support, and materials. Ratings presented in this report are not disaggregated by the variations in implementation of whole school reforms. Reading outcomes from all studies included in this report are examined together and formed the basis for a single effectiveness rating for each outcome domain.

### Research

One study met the WWC evidence standards and six studies met WWC evidence standards with reservations. Altogether, the studies included nearly 6,000 students attending more than 90 elementary schools across the United States. The seven studies focused on students in grades K–3 who received the *SFA*<sup>®</sup>

intervention for varying amounts of time.<sup>2</sup> The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *SFA*<sup>®</sup> to be moderate to large for alphabets, comprehension, and general reading achievement. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed fluency.

1. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from the publicly available program web site ([www.successforall.net](http://www.successforall.net), downloaded February 2007). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.
2. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

**Effectiveness** *Success for All*® was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabetics and general reading achievement and mixed effects on comprehension.

	<b>Alphabetics</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	<b>Comprehension</b>	<b>General reading achievement</b>
<b>Rating of effectiveness</b>	Potentially positive effects	na	Mixed effects	Potentially positive effects
<b>Improvement index<sup>3</sup></b>	Average: +13 percentile points Range: 0 to +32 percentile points	na	Average: +8 percentile points Range: 0 to +17 percentile points	Average: +10 percentile points Range: +2 to +22 percentile points

na = not applicable

### Additional program information<sup>1</sup>

#### Developer and contact

Developed by Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins University, *Success for All*® is distributed by Success for All Foundation, Inc., 200 W. Towsontown Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21204-5200. Email: [sfainfo@successforall.org](mailto:sfainfo@successforall.org) Web: [www.successforall.net](http://www.successforall.net) Telephone: (800) 548-4998 ext. 2372.

#### Scope of Use

*SFA*® is used by schools in 48 states, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. According to the Success for All Foundation, more than 1,300 schools in over 500 districts have used the *SFA*® whole school reform program. Israel, Canada, Mexico, and Australia have implemented adapted versions of *SFA*®.

#### Teaching

During the regular daily 90-minute reading period, students are grouped into reading classes of 15–20 students who are all performing at the same reading level (regardless of age- or grade-level). Regrouping allows teachers to teach the whole class without having to break the class into multiple smaller reading groups.

Reading teachers at every grade level begin the period by reading children’s literature to students. Teachers discuss the

story with students to enhance the students’ understanding of the story and the story structure and to increase their listening and speaking vocabulary. In kindergarten and first grade, teachers emphasize the development of language skills and use phonetically regular storybooks and instruction to focus on phonemic awareness, auditory discrimination, and sound blending. In the second through fifth grade, teachers use school- or district-provided reading materials, either basal or trade books, in a structured set of interactive activities in which students read, discuss, and write about the books. At this stage, teachers emphasize cooperative learning activities built around partner reading. Students work on identifying characters, settings, and problem solutions in narratives. Students receive direct instruction in reading comprehension skills.

Teachers in their first year teaching *SFA*® receive a three-day summer training and 12 additional on-site support days during the school year. Additional in-service presentations covering topics such as classroom management, instructional pace, and cooperative learning are made by school facilitators and other program staff throughout the year. Facilitators organize information sessions to allow teachers to share problems and solutions, suggest changes, and discuss individual children. Twice a year, trainers provided by the developer visit and observe teachers.

3. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

## Additional program information *(continued)*

After the first year, training is reinforced by regular in-services, an annual SFA® conference, and on-site implementation support visits for school leaders and teachers. The staff development model used in whole school SFA® reform emphasizes relatively brief initial training with extensive classroom follow-up, coaching, and group discussion.

Principals and facilitators receive five days of initial training in leadership, data collection and progress monitoring, classroom

instructional practices, school climate, and intervention using SFA® strategies.

### Cost

The cost of the SFA® whole school reform program is approximately \$80,000 in the first year, about \$50,000 in the second year, and \$35,000 in the third. Teacher training and ongoing support is required and is included in the cost of the program.

## Research

Seventy-four studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of SFA®. One study (Borman, Slavin, Cheung, Chamberlain, Madden, & Chambers, 2006) was a randomized controlled trial that met WWC evidence standards. Six other studies (Dianda & Flaherty, 1995; Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993; Ross, Alberg, & McNelis, 1997; Ross & Casey, 1998; Ross, McNelis, Lewis, & Loomis, 1998; and Smith, Ross, Faulks, Casey, Shapiro, & Johnson, 1993) were quasi-experimental designs that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The remaining studies did not meet WWC evidence screens.

Some studies measured the impact of SFA® after a cohort of students was exposed to SFA® for one, two, and three years. To determine ratings, the WWC used results from the final year reported in a study for the overall domain rating, prioritizing the outcomes that reflected students' exposure to the intervention for the longest period of time available.<sup>4</sup> The studies in this report reflect results after: (1) three years of exposure to SFA® (2 studies); (2) two years of exposure to SFA® (2 studies); and (3) one year of exposure to SFA® (3 studies).

### Met evidence standards

- Borman, Slavin, Cheung, Chamberlain, Madden, & Chambers (2006) was a cluster randomized controlled trial that examined the effects of SFA® on students in grades K–2 across 14

states. The study randomly assigned 41 schools to SFA® and the comparison conditions and presented findings on students who had completed one, two, or three years of the program compared with students who took part in their schools' typical reading program. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on findings from the third-year longitudinal sample of 1,425 students who began the study in kindergarten in 18 intervention and 17 comparison schools.

### Met evidence standards with reservations

- Dianda and Flaherty (1995) studied the impact of SFA® on three different cohorts of students who started kindergarten in 1992, 1993, or 1994. Students were from six elementary schools in California. Students were grouped into four language categories; the WWC focuses only on the English-speaking group of 539 students for this review.<sup>5</sup> SFA® students were compared with students who did not use the SFA® program. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on findings for the three cohorts who were exposed to SFA® for two, three, or four years.
- Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik (1993) evaluated the effects of SFA® in Baltimore City elementary schools. The authors evaluated three different levels of implementation of the SFA® program: full implementation, curriculum only,

4. SFA® is designed to teach children to read at grade level by third grade and the third year of program implementation is regarded as the full “dose” of *Success for All* (Borman et al., 2006).

5. The WWC Beginning Reading topic focuses only on students learning to read in English (see [Beginning Reading Protocol](#)).

## Research *(continued)*

and focus on dropout prevention.<sup>6</sup> The WWC focused on the full implementation portion of the study. Two schools that implemented the *SFA*<sup>®</sup> were compared with two matched comparison schools that received a traditional reading basal program. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on the findings for students at the end of three years of implementation for alphabets and general reading achievement domains.

- Ross, Alberg, and McNelis (1997) included first-grade students from 19 elementary schools implementing alternative school-wide programs in the Northwest. The 19 schools were formed into four clusters of similar schools. For this review, the WWC reported results from students in three *SFA*<sup>®</sup> schools who were compared with the students from three schools that implemented the *Accelerated Schools* program. This subsample consisted of “cluster 2A” schools, which were neither the most disadvantaged, nor the most affluent, schools in the sample. This WWC review focused on the findings for 425 students at the end of the second grade, who had received one year of the *SFA*<sup>®</sup> program.
- Ross and Casey (1998) examined the effects of *SFA*<sup>®</sup> in three schools in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, by comparing them with five schools that implemented “locally developed programs.” The WWC focused on students who started the program in kindergarten at two *SFA*<sup>®</sup> schools. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on the findings for 288 students at the end of first grade who received two years of *SFA*<sup>®</sup>.

- Ross, McNelis, Lewis, & Loomis (1998) included 97 first-grade students from four elementary schools located in Little Rock, Arkansas. Two schools that implemented the *SFA*<sup>®</sup> were compared with two matched comparison schools that did not receive the intervention. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on findings at the end of the second grade after students received one year of *SFA*<sup>®</sup> implementation.
- Smith, Ross, Faulks, Casey, Shapiro, & Johnson (1993) evaluated *SFA*<sup>®</sup> in two elementary schools in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, by comparing them with similar students in two matched comparison schools that did not receive *SFA*<sup>®</sup>. The WWC based effectiveness ratings on findings for 286 students spread across kindergarten and first grade who had received one year of *SFA*<sup>®</sup> implementation.

### Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.<sup>7</sup>

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *SFA*<sup>®</sup> to be moderate to large for alphabets, comprehension, and general reading achievement. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed fluency.

6. The curriculum only intervention is a particular version of the *SFA*<sup>®</sup> program that only uses the beginning reading curriculum rather than the whole school reform approach (Slavin et al., 1990). The curriculum only portion of the study included only one school in comparison condition and did not meet WWC evidence screens. The dropout prevention portion met evidence standards with reservations but was not considered in the intervention rating because it went beyond the standard delivery of the program. However, results are reported in Appendices A4.7–A4.9.
7. The Extent of Evidence Categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as the students’ demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.

## Effectiveness Findings

The WWC beginning reading review addresses student outcomes in four domains: alphabetics, fluency, comprehension, and general reading achievement.<sup>8</sup> Studies included in this report cover three domains: alphabetics, comprehension, and general reading achievement. Alphabetics includes five constructs: phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, print awareness, letter knowledge, and phonics. Comprehension includes two constructs: reading comprehension and vocabulary development. General reading achievement includes outcome measures that do not explicitly differentiate among different reading domains (e.g., a summary standardized test score). The findings below present the authors' estimates and WWC-calculated estimates of the size and the statistical significance of the effects on students.<sup>9</sup> The results are presented by domain for each of the SFA<sup>®</sup> studies that met the WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.

### Alphabetics

In the alphabetics domain, seven studies addressed phonics outcomes and one of these studies also measured students' letter knowledge skills.

#### *Three years of program implementation:*

- Borman et al (2006) examined scores on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT) and reported statistically significant positive effects for two phonics subtests: Word Identification and Word Attack. The WWC analysis confirmed the statistical significance of these effects.
- For each SFA<sup>®</sup> school,<sup>10</sup> Madden et al. (1993) found statistically significant positive effects on the phonics measure (the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery (WLPB) Word Attack

subtest) for preschoolers and first-graders and statistically significant positive effects on the WLPB Letter-Word Identification subtest for kindergarteners. The WWC found that none of the combined effects across schools were statistically significant, but the average effect size across these outcomes was substantively important according to WWC criteria (that is, an effect size of at least 0.25).

#### *Two years of program implementation:*

- Dianda and Flaherty (1995) reported effect sizes, but did not report on the statistical significance of the effect of SFA<sup>®</sup> on two phonics measures: the WLPB Letter-Word Identification subtest and the Word Attack subtest. According to WWC calculations, there were no statistically significant effects of SFA<sup>®</sup>, but the average effect size across the two measures was positive and large enough to be considered substantively important.
- Ross and Casey (1998) reported no statistically significant effect of SFA<sup>®</sup> for one phonics measure (WRMT Word Identification subtest) but found a statistically significant positive effect for the other phonics measure (WRMT Word Attack subtest). In WWC computations, neither of the effects was statistically significant, and the average effect was not large enough to be considered substantively important.

#### *One year of program implementation:*

- Ross, Alberg, and McNelis (1997) did not find a statistically significant effect of SFA<sup>®</sup> for one phonics measure (the WRMT Word Identification subtest), but did find a statistically significant positive effect for the other phonics measure (WRMT Word Attack subtest). The WWC analyses showed that neither of the effects was statistically significant. In addition, the average effect size across the two outcomes was neither

8. For definitions of the domains, see the [Beginning Reading Protocol](#).

9. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the WWC Tutorial on Mismatch. See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Success for All*<sup>®</sup>, a correction for multiple comparisons was needed for Borman et al. (2006). In the case of the six other studies, corrections for clustering and multiple comparisons were needed.

10. Two SFA<sup>®</sup> elementary schools were included in the analyses of third-year outcomes.

## Effectiveness *(continued)*

statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important.

- Ross et al. (1998) study found no statistically significant effects of *SFA*® on the two phonics outcomes: WRMT Word Identification and Word Attack subtests. The WWC analyses also found that no effects were statistically significant, but the average effect size across outcomes was positive and large enough to be considered substantively important.
- Smith et al. (1993) reported no statistically significant effect of *SFA*® on the letter knowledge construct (WRMT Letter Identification subtest), but found statistically significant positive effects for the two phonics outcomes (WRMT Word Identification and Word Attack subtests) for first-grade students. For kindergarten students, the authors found statistically significant positive effects for the WRMT Letter Identification and the Word Identification subtests. The WWC calculations found that although none of these effects were statistically significant, the average effect size across outcomes was positive and large enough to be substantively important.

Overall, in the alphabets domain, one study with a strong design showed statistically significant positive effects. Four studies showed substantively important positive effects and two studies showed indeterminate effects.<sup>11</sup>

### **Comprehension**

In the comprehension domain, six studies addressed reading comprehension outcomes, and one of these studies also measured students' vocabulary development skills.

#### *Three years of program implementation:*

- Borman et al. (2006) reported and the WWC confirmed a statistically significant positive effect of *SFA*® on the WRMT Passage Comprehension subtest.

#### *Two years of program implementation:*

- Dianda and Flaherty (1995) did not report on the statistical significance of the effect of *SFA*® on the WLPB Passage Comprehension subtest. The WWC found no statistically significant effect, but the positive effect was large enough to be considered substantively important according to WWC criteria.
- Ross and Casey (1998) reported no statistically significant effect of *SFA*® on the WRMT Passage Comprehension subtest. In addition, the WWC found that the effect size was positive, but not substantively important.

#### *One year of program implementation:*

- Ross, Alberg, and McNelis (1997) reported no statistically significant effect on the WRMT Passage Comprehension subtest and the WWC found that the effect size was positive, but not substantively important.
- Ross et al. (1998) reported and the WWC confirmed a positive, but neither statistically significant nor substantively important effect of *SFA*® on the WRMT Passage Comprehension subtest.
- Smith et al. (1993) reported no statistically significant effect of *SFA*® on the vocabulary development measure (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) for kindergarteners. For first-graders, the study authors found a statistically significant positive effect on the WRMT Passage Comprehension subtest. The WWC analysis found that none of the effects were statistically significant; and the average effect size across all outcomes was not large enough to be considered substantively important.

For the comprehension domain, one study reported a statistically significant positive effect and had a strong design. One study showed substantively important positive effects, and four studies showed indeterminate effects.

11. Indeterminate effects are defined as effects that are not statistically significant and with effect sizes smaller than 0.25.

## Effectiveness *(continued)*

### General reading achievement

Six studies examined outcomes in the general reading achievement domain.

#### *Three years of program implementation:*

- Dianda and Flaherty (1995) examined the effects of SFA® on the combined measure of WLPB and Durrell Oral Reading subtest for three cohorts of students after two to four years of program implementation. The authors did not report on the statistical significance of the findings. The WWC effect size computations found that although none of the effects was statistically significant, the mean effect size across all outcomes was positive and large enough to be considered substantively important.
- For each SFA® school,<sup>10</sup> Madden et al. (1993) found statistically significant positive effects of SFA® on the Durrell Oral Reading subtest for kindergarten and first-grade students. The WWC computations found that none of the positive effects combined across schools were statistically significant; but the mean effect across grade levels was large enough to be considered substantively important.

#### *Two years of program implementation:*

- Ross and Casey (1998) reported and the WWC confirmed a positive but neither statistically significant nor substantively important effect of SFA® on the Durrell Oral Reading subtest.

#### *One year of program implementation:*

- Ross, Alberg, and McNelis (1997) reported and the WWC confirmed a positive but neither statistically significant nor substantively important effect of SFA® on the Durrell Oral Reading subtest.
- Smith et al. (1993) found a statistically significant positive effect of SFA® on the Durrell Oral Reading subtest. The WWC computations found that the effect was not statistically significant, but large enough to be considered substantively important.
- The Ross et al. (1998) reported and the WWC confirmed a positive, but neither statistically significant nor substantively important effect on the Durrell Oral Reading subtest.

In the general reading domain, three studies reported substantively important positive effects and three studies showed indeterminate effects. No study had a strong design.

### Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

The average improvement index for alphabets is +13 percentile points across the seven studies, with a range of 0 to +32 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for comprehension is +8 percentile points across the six studies, with a range of 0 to +17 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for general reading is +10 percentile points across the six studies, with a range of +2 to +22 percentile points across findings.

**The WWC found *Success for All*® to have potentially positive effects on alphabets and general reading achievement domains and mixed effects on comprehension**

### Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the

**Summary**

The WWC reviewed 74 studies on *Success for All*®. One of these studies met WWC evidence standards; six studies met WWC evidence standards with reservations; the remaining studies did not meet WWC evidence screens. Based on the seven studies,

the WWC found potentially positive effects in the alphabetics and general reading achievement domains, and mixed effects in the comprehension domain. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research and may change as new studies emerge.

**References** **Met WWC evidence standards**

Borman, G. D., Slavin, R. E., Cheung, A., Chamberlain, A., Madden, N., & Chambers, B. (2006). *Final reading outcomes of the national randomized field trial of Success for All*. Retrieved from Success for All Web site: [http://www.successforall.net/\\_images/pdfs/Third\\_Year\\_Results\\_06.doc](http://www.successforall.net/_images/pdfs/Third_Year_Results_06.doc)

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**Met evidence standards with reservations**

Dianda, M., & Flaherty, J. (1995, April). *Effects of Success for All on the reading achievement of first graders in California bilingual programs*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

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Livingston, M., & Flaherty, J. (1997). *Effects of Success for All on reading achievement in California schools*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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Slavin, R. E., Madden, N. A., Dolan, L. J., & Wasik, B. A. (1996). Success for All: A summary of research. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 1(1), 41–76. **(Study: California)**

Madden, N. A., Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N., Dolan, L., & Wasik, B. A. (1993). Success for All: Longitudinal effects of a restructuring program for inner-city elementary schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 30(1), 123–148.

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**For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Success for All Technical Appendices](#).**

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## References *(continued)*

12. The outcome measures are not relevant to this review: the parameters for this WWC review specified student outcome measures but this study did not focus on students.
13. Does not use a strong causal design: this study was a quasi-experimental design but did not use achievement pretests to establish that the comparison group was equivalent to the intervention group at baseline.
14. The sample is not appropriate to this review: the parameters for this WWC review specified that students should be in grades kindergarten through third grade during the time of the intervention; this study did not focus on the targeted grades.
15. The study, which used a quasi-experimental design, reported an extreme overall attrition rate.
16. Does not use a strong causal design: for the portion of the sample of interest to this WWC review, there was only one intervention and/or one comparison unit, so the analysis could not separate the effects of the intervention from other factors.
17. Does not use a strong causal design: this study did not use a comparison group.
18. The sample is not appropriate to this review: the parameters for this WWC review specified that students should be in grades kindergarten through third grade; this study did not disaggregate students in the eligible range from those outside the range.
19. The sample is not appropriate to this review: this study did not focus on students learning to read in English, one of the parameters for this WWC review.
20. The sample is not appropriate to this review: the parameters for this WWC review specified student outcome measures, but this study did not focus on students.
21. Does not use a strong causal design: this study, which used a quasi-experimental design, did not use equating measures to ensure that the comparison group was equivalent to the intervention group.
22. Does not use a strong causal design: for the portion of the sample of interest for this WWC review, there was a confound, with the intervention being modified or combined with other interventions, making it difficult to attribute study outcomes to the intervention.
23. Does not use a strong causal design: this study, which used a quasi-experimental design, experienced attrition which led to possible bias in reporting.
24. Does not use a strong causal design: for the portion of the sample of interest to this WWC review, there was only one intervention and one comparison unit, so the analysis could not separate the effects of the intervention from other factors.
25. Does not use a strong causal design: this study was a quasi-experimental design but did not establish that the comparison group was equivalent to the intervention group at baseline.
26. Confound: The effects of the intervention could not be separated from other factors; the impact of the agent of the intervention was confounded with the impact of the intervention.